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Reagan signs bill to bar naming spies

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan, calling CIA agents the "heroes of a grim twilight struggle," yesterday signed a bill making it a crime to disclose the names of American spies.

Civil rights officials denounced it as blatantly unconstitutional and offered legal assistance to challenge it.

To sign the bill into law, Reagan flew by helicopter to the sprawling

CIA complex in nearby Langley, Va., and appeared on the lawn before several thousand agency employees. Then he gave a private pep talk to clandestine employees whom the CIA did not want seen by the press.

Even on the heavily guarded grounds, extra security precautions were taken. Agency employees had to walk through metal detectors before they could attend the signing ceremony, and Secret Service agents were stationed about 25 feet apart outside the fence bordering the property.

The bill makes it a crime to disclose the name of a covert intelligence agent even if the information is obtained from public records. It provides penalties of up to 10 years in jail and \$50,000 in fines for government employees who expose the identities of covert U.S. intelligence agents living in foreign countries.

Those outside government, including reporters and scholars, could be imprisoned for up to four years and

fined \$15,000 for revealing names of spies if there were reason to believe that such actions would disrupt American intelligence operations.

Referring to the arguments over the bill's constitutionality, Reagan said: "The Congress has carefully drafted this bill so that it focuses only on those who would transgress the bounds of decency — not those who would exercise their legitimate right of dissent. This carefully drawn act recognizes that the revelation of the names of secret agents adds nothing to legitimate public debate over intelligence policy.

"It is also a signal to the world that while we and this democratic nation remain tolerant and flexible, we also retain our good sense and our resolve to protect our own security and that of the brave men and women who serve us in difficult and dangerous intelligence assignments," he said to applause from the crowd.

Jerry Berman, legislative counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), said the law was a "clearly unconstitutional infringement on the right of free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment."

Morton Halperin, an ACLU spokesman on the legislation, said, "The press, scholars and other members of the public retain their constitutional right to inform their fellow citizens and to criticize the government and in the process to reveal the identities of covert agents where they believe that to be appropriate."

Halperin said the ACLU would provide legal assistance to anyone whose ability to speak or write is threatened by the legislation or by any effort of the Justice Department to enforce the law.

Reagan said that the law was a vote of confidence in the CIA, which had been the target of "nearly a decade of neglect and sometimes overzealous criticism," and that "the real or imagined abuses of the past . . . are behind us."